APEC Membership for India

*592. SHRI P. UPENDRA:
SHRI CHIMANBHAI MEHTA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India is trying for membership of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof;

(c) what are the obligations of APEC with regard to bringing down tariffs and other matters;

(d) what are the highest and lowest tariffs in APEC countries; and

(e) whether they impose quota restrictions while keeping down their tariffs?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) India has, since the Seoul Ministerial Meeting of APEC in October, 1991, been indicating its interest in participating in the APEC. The APEC Summit Meeting held in Seattle in November, 1993 took a decision to freezed the membership of APEC for three years. The question of India's admission into APEC, therefore, cannot be considered before 1997.

Pending membership, India has expressed its interest to participate in APEC Working Group activities of priority interest. The APEC Ministerial Meeting held at Bogor (Indonesia) in November, 1994 decided to ask the APEC Senior Officials to submit to the 1995 Ministerial Meeting criteria and principles for participation of non-members in APEC Working Groups. The participation of India and other non-members in the APEC Working Groups will, therefore, be considered after a decision on this is taken at the Third Summit.

(c) to (e) The APEC Economic Leaders at their second meeting held at Bogor (Indonesia) on November 15, 1994 announced their commitment to complete the achievement of their goal of free and open trade and investment in Asia-Pacific no later than 2020 for developing countries and 2010 for industrialised countries, by reducing trade barriers and by promoting the free flow of goods, services and capital. APEC economies are yet to spell out clearly the modalities of achieving free trade and investment by 2020 and are working on an action agenda to be considered at the Third APEC Summit in Osaka in November, 1995.

The highest and the lowest tariffs in the APEC economies range from 140% to 0% respectively.

Collection of Toll Tax on National Highways

*593. SHRI MOOLCHAND MEENA:
SHRI SANJAY DALMIA:

Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

(a) whether toll tax is being collected in respect of the bridges constructed on the national highways; and

(b) if so, the time upto which the toll tax is likely to be collected in respect of the bridges at Jhansi-Kanpur-Lucknow highway over Ganga and Yamuna rivers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI JAGDISH TYTLER): (a) Yes, Sir. Fee is collected on permanent bridges costing more than Rs. 100 lakhs.

(b) As per present projection, collection of fee is likely to continue upto December, 1997 on Ganga bridge and May, 2000 on Yamuna bridge. This will, however, depend upon the volume of traffic.

Import of Wagons

*594. SHRI J.S. RAJU:
SHRI SANJAY DALMIA:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are importing wagons for Railways; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons for such imports?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI C.K. JAFFER SHARIEF): (a) Indian Railways are not importing any railway wagons. However, Container Corporation of India (CONCOR), a Public Sector Undertaking of the Ministry of Railways had invited bids for flat wagons for transportation of I.S.O. containers.

(b) Bids have been invited by CONCOR under international Competitive Bidding since the purchase is to be financed by a World Bank loan. Indian companies have also participated in the tender.

Tender has not yet been settled.

Development of agro-based units

*595. SHRI RAHASBIHARI BARIK:
SHRI SARADA MOHANTY:

Will the Minister of FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have asked the State Governments to prepare schemes for the establishment and development of agro-based units in their respective States;

(b) if so, the response of the State Governments thereto; and

(c) the details of steps taken by different State Governments to promote agro-based food processing units?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES (SHRI TARUN GOGOI): (a) to (c) During the meetings with the State representatives and Nodal agencies, the States were advised to accord priority to the development of agro-food industries in their States and provide requisite incentives. They were also advised to prepare specific schemes keeping the potential and the State resources in view. As per available information, almost all States have declared food processing industries as a thrust area and are providing varying types of incentives in different States. These incentives inter-alia include exemption/refund of sales tax, capital subsidies, subsidy or exemption of electricity duty, seed capital assistance for small units, subsidy on term loan, assistance for market promotion, etc. Many States are providing funds to their State public sector undertakings/ corporations for promoting food processing industries in the public sector/joint sector/assisted sector.

Indian Citizens in Pakistani Jails

*596. SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN:
SHRI VIREN J. SHAH:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what is the number of Indian citizens at present languishing in Pakistani jails;

(b) under what offences and since when each of them has been detained;

(c) what are the details of the Army and Air Force personnel missing since 1971 war or otherwised detained in Pakistani jails, since when they have been detained there, and what is their present position;

(d) what are the details of the steps Government have so far taken for the release/exchange of Indian prisoners; and

(e) the number of Indian prisoners released/exchanged with Pakistani prisoners since 1971 war?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (e) According to available information there are at present 1213 Indian prisoners in Pakistani jails. The Indian nationals are detained on various grounds including alleged transgression of local laws or overstay of visa period in Pakistan; apprehension in the waters in the region where the Indo-Pak maritime boundary is yet to be determined; straying across the IB and LOC, etc.